



OFFICE OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

Chris Abele

MILWAUKEE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

The Honorable Robin Vos
Room 317 East
State Capitol, P.O. Box 7882
Madison, WI 53707-7882

The Honorable Alberta Darling
Room 309 East
State Capitol, P.O. Box 8953
Madison, WI 53708

May 23, 2011

Dear Rep. Vos and Senator Darling:

As you are well aware, few priorities are as important in the current economy as creating and maintaining private sector jobs. That is why we are especially troubled by how the current state budget puts needed funding at risk for an already severely strained transit system here in Milwaukee County.

Left unaddressed, the state budget is poised to cut approximately \$13.6 million from Milwaukee County's transit system. About 39 percent of the 140,000 daily rides on the transit system are rides used by people going to or from a job. Another five percent use the transit system to go to a job interview. And thousands more – 11 percent of all riders – are future workers now at Milwaukee Public Schools and our colleges and universities who use the transit system to get the skills and training they need to enter the job market.

Maintaining a thriving transit system in Milwaukee County is a key part of keeping the economic engine of our state strong. With gas prices hovering at record levels and funding for road building set to increase, we encourage you to balance transit funding in the state budget so that our workers can get to their jobs.

For these reasons, we encourage you to consider the following changes as you discuss transit funding and the next state budget:

- **Restore the state transportation fund as the source of funding for transit aid.** Removing transit funding from the transportation fund and moving it to the general fund makes it much easier for that funding to be diverted to other purposes, at a time when our residents need more options, not fewer, to handle record fuel prices.
- **Ensure that the termination of the Southeast Regional Transit Authority (SERTA) does not penalize Milwaukee County taxpayers.** The best public data shows that the vast majority of the \$1.27 million in leftover funds at SERTA came from Milwaukee County via a rental car tax. Milwaukee County taxpayers should receive that money back to protect County's transit system, rather than have it diverted to other transit systems.
- **Eliminate transit cuts to ensure proper balance between transit funding and other transportation projects.** Media reports have shown that the proposed budget contains an increase in highway funding. Meanwhile, the legislative fiscal bureau recently re-estimated the transportation fund balance and found it will contain an additional \$27 million in funding. By keeping transit funding in the transportation fund and using just \$14 million of that funding for local transit aid, Milwaukee County can avoid cutting its transit system by \$7 million, and likewise, the rest of the state's transit systems will be able to maintain funding at the current level during the next budget cycle.

We realize that in the current fiscal environment, everyone must do more with less. But we encourage you to consider these options that will protect our ability to remain competitive as we jointly seek to help train and educate our workers and create and retain jobs in Southeast Wisconsin.

Sincerely,

Chris Abele,
Milwaukee County
Executive

Tom Barrett
Milwaukee Mayor

Tim Sheehy
President, MMAC

Greg Thornton
Superintendent, MPS

Michael Lovell
Chancellor, UWM

CC: Chairman Lee Holloway Joint Finance Committee Governor Scott Walker Sec. Mark Gottlieb

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